

SPEECH

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OF

HON. ALEXANDER W. BUEL,

IN DEFENCE OF

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE UNION,

DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC DINNER GIVEN TO HIM BY HIS FELLOW-  
CITIZENS AT DETROIT,

NOVEMBER 19, 1850.

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I have taken an oath to support the Constitution—the whole Constitution, not a PART.  
The Union was born by fraternity, and it must live by fraternity, or perish forever.

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## SPEECH.

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To the following sentiment—

“*Our Guest*—Hon. A. W. BUEL: Representing faithfully the Union sentiment of Michigan; supporting earnestly and ably those measures of compromise by which alone we could reasonably hope to insure prosperity to our Union and “domestic tranquillity” to the several States; aiding by vote and voice the friends of freedom everywhere; fearlessly and eloquently defending our State and City against misrepresentation and insult; and upholding manfully, upon all occasions, the Constitution of his Country,—he has won the noblest title to our respect and gratitude. Michigan will sustain him.”

Mr. BUEL responded:

FELLOW-CITIZENS: If I should be silent on this occasion, or fail to respond to the sentiment which you have just received with such tokens of approbation, I feel that I should disobey the first promptings of a grateful heart. To those with whom I have been politically associated, and who, in times past, have often given me their generous support, I owe a deep debt of gratitude which I can never forget. But I owe them something more. I owe an unfaltering devotion to the principles they have advocated during that trying period, which is testing the stability of the Republic.

To enjoy the confidence of one's party is a source of satisfaction. But there are times and occasions, when the voice of party is in a measure hushed, and ancient political landmarks for a season lose their importance in the all-absorbing thought of the public safety. I find myself surrounded now not merely by those, who have hitherto been my political friends and associates. I perceive something more, which gives character to the occasion. Among those who participate in it, I recognise many, who have left behind them the lines which have hitherto separated us; and I cannot but perceive, that in their estimation there is something new and extraordinary in the state of our public affairs, which calls for new and extraordinary action. You are assembled, therefore, my friends, I choose to believe, not to honor the humble individual who addresses you, but the principles, which you in common with him are advocating. I think I am not mistaken, when I say, that you are assembled to honor the noble feelings which inspire us, and to cultivate a spirit of *national* patriotism, in opposition to that spirit of *sectionalism*, which is fast severing the bonds of our Union. Parties must exist, as they ever have existed in all republics. But when our country is in danger; when there exists a very general and painful apprehension for its future safety; in short, *when measures are being concerted for the overthrow of the Constitution and the Union,—there ought to be but ONE PARTY, AND THAT PARTY OURSELVES, ONE AND INSEPARABLE.*

The circumstances of this occasion are such as, I trust, will justify the allusions I have made to myself, as well as those I may feel constrained to make in the continuation of my remarks. I cannot fail to recognise in them a personal compliment to myself, for which I desire to offer you my sincere thanks



and gratitude. I can possess and transmit to others no more precious testimonial of your approbation than that, by which you have seen fit to connect my name and my service in Congress with that struggle for the Union, which enrolls amongst its defenders the wisest patriots and statesmen of the country.

But you will, I trust, permit me to look beyond all personal compliments involved in our present festivities, for the purpose of submitting some observations upon those topics, which have of late so fearfully agitated, and still agitate the public mind. There is no man in this Republic, the value of whose position, compared with that of preserving the Union, does not sink at once into utter insignificance. The times call for something more than mere personal expediency. In my opinion, that patriotism is unequal to the emergency, which dares not meet openly and boldly the dangers that surround us, be the personal consequences what they may.

I have but recently returned to mingle again with my constituency, after an absence of nearly a year. During that period I have passed through the most exciting and eventful scenes, that have distinguished any session of Congress since the organization of the government. The country has enjoyed an unexampled degree of prosperity; we have lived under the happiest and freest government on the face of the globe, in the full enjoyment of all the blessings of civil and religious liberty. The minister of the gospel, the professional man of every kind, the mechanic, the merchant, and the farmer, have been free to prosecute their respective pursuits, and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Our firesides have been undisturbed by the unwelcome sound of war. Yet, in the midst of all this prosperity, the nation has been profoundly agitated. Congress has for nine long months debated, and thousands of our fellow-citizens have advocated a dissolution of that Union, under whose blessings we have been steadily advancing to a degree of prosperity and renown never before attained by any nation.

The signs of approaching evil were manifested on the first assembling of the present Congress. In the short space of a month, a dark cloud gathered over the fair Capitol of our country. It was removed for a season, but has now returned; and there it still hangs, more pregnant than before with evil and ruin, and threatening ere long, unless dispersed, to hurl its bolts of wrath, and sweep away the fabric of our Union. "Disunion," and that other word, "dissolution," which, as an eloquent senator said, ought to be considered the "*unpronounceable* word of our language," became familiar and hackneyed. On the 13th day of December, it being less than two weeks after the commencement of the session, those words were applauded in all parts of the House with the most violent clapping of hands, as they fell from the lips of a distinguished representative from the South. The scene was, it is true, one of passion and excitement; but its worst omen for the future was, that many representatives joined in the applause, who had hitherto been distinguished for coolness, deliberation, and patriotic devotion to the Union. A few months rolled on: but affairs, instead of growing better, became worse. The giant minds of the Senate—men who had seen their thirty and forty years' service in the halls of Congress—now began to tremble before the signs of the times. In the strong language of Mr. Webster, "*the imprisoned winds seemed to have been let loose.*"

Such was the state of things in which I found myself involved soon after the assembling of Congress. I thought it well became us to pause, and turn for a season from the usual excitements of business and party, and consider, if there were not some means, by which we could forever put to rest an agitation so serious and alarming in its nature and consequences. Extremists upon one side claimed everything for the North, and extremists upon the other everything for the South. It was evident, therefore, that there could be no settlement without some *mutual* concession. Such was the state of things when, in the spirit of conciliation and a lofty patriotism, Mr. Clay brought forward his compromise



resolutions. They related chiefly to the settlement of the Texan boundary, the establishment of territorial governments for Utah and New Mexico, the admission of California, the abolition of the slave-trade in the District of Columbia, and the surrender of fugitive slaves. The resolution upon the latter subject was in these words :

*" Resolved, That more effectual provisions ought to be made by law, according to the requirements of the constitution, for the restitution and delivery of persons bound to service or labor in any State who may escape into any other State or Territory in the Union "*

These resolutions were referred to the compromise committee, consisting, so far as practicable, of an equal representation from the two great parties, and from both sections of the Union, having Mr. Clay for chairman. The committee reported a series of compromise bills, usually called the " compromise system," or " peace measures." These consisted of the so-called " omnibus bill," which provided for settling the Texas boundary, establishing territorial governments over New Mexico and Utah, and for admitting California entire as a new State ; a bill for abolishing the slave-trade in the District of Columbia, and a bill providing for the more effectual surrender of fugitive slaves. The " omnibus bill" was first considered, and, after several months of exciting and angry discussion, was defeated. The friends of the Union, not yet despairing of being able to effect some adjustment between the North and South, now rallied in support of each compromise bill or measure by itself. I will not detain you with a detailed history of these bills in the Senate, and the various amendments offered or adopted, and the further exciting discussions, which were at last terminated with the separate adoption by the Senate of each measure.

These measures came to the House as they passed the Senate ; the Texan boundary bill being first in the series. I should weary your patience by undertaking to analyze them on this occasion. I cannot say, that I approved of every provision contained in these various bills. But I felt, that there was a pressing necessity for adjusting speedily, in some form, the difficult questions which now more than ever threatened the future peace of the country. With time and angry discussion, the aspect of affairs had become much more alarming. Texas had been concerting measures for occupying the disputed territory. Almost the entire population of the South was beginning to sympathize actively with her. Governor Quitman, of Mississippi, had published a letter to the effect, that, in the event of a collision of arms, or great danger thereof, he would deem it his duty to convene the legislature of his State, and recommend the adoption of prompt and efficient measures to aid Texas. But, in the mean time, the late President had taken measures for concentrating troops at Santa Fé, under the apprehension of an open conflict with Texas, and the present President had sent his special message to Congress, earnestly urging upon that body the importance of a speedy adjustment, but at the same time expressing his determination to maintain possession of the disputed territory, with the military power of the government, until the question should be settled. The Texas legislature was holding a special session, and devising means for raising several regiments of troops to be marched to Santa Fé. Thus were matters rapidly approaching the crisis of civil war, the end of which, when once commenced, no one could foresee.

But there was much more now to excite attention in the general aspect of affairs. The Nashville Convention had been held, composed of representatives from nearly every Southern State, and many of them had been sent there, not by excited popular conventions, but in pursuance of special State legislation. That convention had issued its address to the country, which Mr. Webster, on the floor of the Senate, pronounced a " disunion argument," and had adjourned to meet again after the adjournment of Congress.



Besides, South Carolina, it was known, was quite ripe for secession, and was waiting only for southern support. Georgia—even the patriotic State of Georgia, which had stood by Jackson and the Union in former days of trial—had at last yielded to the pressure of agitation. Its legislature had declared her settled hostility to the admission of California and the passage of the Wilmot Proviso, in the most solemn manner, by providing by law for a special convention, to be elected and assembled upon the happening of either of those events.

There was another feature in Congress, that could not fail to attract the attention of the friends of adjustment and of the Union—the progress of extreme but opposite opinions—opinions, which were not in themselves identical with disunion, but which, being utterly irreconcilable, if persisted in, must necessarily lead to disunion. I cannot say, that, at the opening of the session, there was a disunionist in Congress. Even Mr. Calhoun was highly offended at an expression of a senator, which he understood as intimating, that he was a disunionist. I do not wish or deem it proper for me here to reflect upon any portion of the honorable body, of which I am now a member; yet I do deem it proper to declare, that, since the meeting of Congress, extreme opinions had made an alarming progress in that body, as well as amongst the people. These opinions were so extreme, but opposite, that they could never be reconciled without concession and compromise. There were the Northern extreme and the Southern extreme, both of which were as wide apart as the poles; and yet both in Congress for many months joined hands and votes against the compromise measures, as a scheme for adjusting *all* the difficult questions, and restoring peace and harmony to the country.

As for myself, I was but a young and humble member of the body. My influence might not proceed beyond my own vote; but I felt even that to be a solemn responsibility, when I believed, as I did, that, to its own extent at least, it might be a vote for or against the preservation of the Constitution and the Union. Between the friends of the compromise measures from the North and South there was an implied faith, that they would sustain them all in their essential features. Without such implication, it is well known they could never have passed.

Under such circumstances, what was my duty? Was it to vote with those, whose opinions and practice, if not designing, were at least, as I thought, fast tending to a dissolution of the Union? Was it to vote with either extreme? No. I would not, I *could* not do it. I owed it to my honor, to sustain in good faith the entire series of measures in their substantial features. I owed it to myself, to my honest convictions, to my sincere apprehensions as to the future; yes, I owed it to my conscience, to my *oath*, to my COUNTRY, to pursue such a course, as I thought would best restore peace and harmony to a divided people, avert the dangers of civil war, and perpetuate the Union with its unnumbered blessings. I determined to do what I thought was my duty, as a national representative, regardless of personal consequences; and the consciousness of having been actuated by the most sacred of all wishes and motives is to me an ample defence against the detraction and calumny, which have recently been lavished upon me without measure.

Nine months of angry discussion rolled away, before the first of the compromise measures finally passed the House of Representatives. The others speedily followed, and their passage was attended with such a spontaneous outburst of public rejoicings, as never before had been witnessed at the capital. Heartfelt congratulations, bands of music, public processions, popular meetings and addresses in the streets, bonfires, and the firing of cannon testified to the common joy; all seemed to speak out, "THE UNION IS NOW SAFE." Even many rejoiced, who had steadily opposed the adjustment measures. The country rejoiced. The leading public journals of opposite political parties rejoiced,



with congratulations to their readers; and it was to me a source of personal satisfaction and pride, that but few, if any, testified more strongly their approbation than those of my own district and State.

But now the scene has suddenly changed, and the theatre of nullification has been transferred from others to ourselves. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact, that a fresh storm of agitation has come upon us, which, if not stayed, threatens most seriously the continuance of the Republic. The patriotic and inspiring language, which Jackson once addressed to others, his spirit now addresses to us; and the friends of peace and fraternity are once more called upon to stand by the Constitution and the Union.

Amongst the measures of adjustment was one for the more effectual surrender of fugitive slaves, according to the requirements of the Constitution. It was well understood, that such a bill should pass, as part of the system of peace measures. The constitution of the United States (art. 4, sec. 2) declares, that fugitives from service or labor "*shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.*" *Not may be, but "SHALL be delivered up,"* is the language. It does not simply confer upon Congress power, but commands and makes it the duty of Congress to act upon the subject, and pass such laws, as may effectually fulfil the requirement of the constitution.

The constitution, however, is not the only source, to which we may apply for instructions and authority upon the subject. The ordinance of 1787 has lately been frequently invoked as high authority upon other subjects, and by many who are now advocating an absolute repeal of the law to which I allude. I have great respect for that ordinance; and to many, upon questions of freedom, it has had almost the authority of the Delphian Oracle. In regard to fugitive slaves, it is almost an exact duplicate of so much of the Constitution as pertains to the same subject; and here is to be found what has been recently called the Wilmot Proviso, *resting side by side, in the same bed, and same paragraph, with a provision for the surrender of fugitive slaves.*

Ordinance of 1787, article 6: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in said Territories, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: *Provided, always,* That, any person escaping into the same from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed, and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid."

It was in accordance with this provision of the ordinance of 1787, and that of the constitution from which I have quoted, that the fugitive slave act of 1793 was passed and approved by Washington.\* This law might have been sufficient

\*NOTE.—Amongst the acts of the last day of John Adams's administration may be found a remarkable one upon the subject of the surrender of fugitive slaves, and to which the public attention has not hitherto been called. It is in accordance with the terms of the Constitution, and is the more remarkable, as it throws much light upon the Constitution, as construed half a century since, by placing fugitives from justice and fugitives from labor on a like footing in respect to their rights in the district to which they may escape.

[ AN ACT supplementary to the act entitled "An act concerning the District of Columbia."

SECTION 6.—*And be it further enacted,* That in all cases where the Constitution or laws of the United States provide that criminals and fugitives from justice, or persons held to labor in any State, escaping into another State, shall be delivered up, the chief justice of the said district shall be, and he is hereby, empowered and required to cause to be apprehended and delivered up such criminal, fugitive from justice, or persons fleeing from service, as the case may be, who shall be found within the district, in the same manner and under the same regulations as the executive authority of the several States are required to do the same; and all executive and judicial officers are hereby required to obey all lawful precepts or other process issued for that purpose, and to be aiding and assisting in such delivery.

Approved March 3, 1801.

JOHN ADAMS.

(See Laws U. S., 2 v., p. 116.)



for its purposes, had its execution not been obstructed. But it is well known that certain individuals at the North, comparatively few in numbers, entertaining extreme opinions upon the subject of slavery, have thrown such obstacles in the way of its execution that it has proved ineffectual for its designs. This led to earnest complaints by the South that the constitution was practically nullified in regard to this subject; and the recent act of Congress is an amendment to the law of 1793, designed effectually to carry out its principles, and in good faith comply with the requirement of the Constitution. It originates no new principle in respect to the liberty of the person claimed as a slave. The essential difference in respect to him is really in his favor, inasmuch as, by the law of 1793, the claimant was authorized to arrest and seize his fugitive slave by force and without process, whilst the law of 1850 authorizes legal proceedings in the first instance. A seizure by force, even if legal, cannot but be repugnant to our feelings, and a resort to the forms of law was considered as more in accordance with the spirit of our institutions.

There are other respects, in which the late law differs from that of 1793, but they do not change substantially the rights of the slave. They are designed chiefly to insure the execution of the law, after the right of the claimant has been once established.

I ought not to omit to notice, in this connexion, some of the gross misrepresentations of this law, which have been industriously circulated, by means of inflammatory handbills, and by inflammatory articles contained in those journals, which were once loud in praising the compromise measures, *the fugitive slave law included*. Many have doubtless honestly yielded to these misrepresentations, but time and reflection will correct the errors into which they have fallen. Even some, I regret to say, of an intelligent and patriotic clergy, have been led astray by these inflammatory misrepresentations, and their weight has fallen upon me, even from the pulpit. I trust they will correct the error, not for my sake merely, but for the sake of those, whom they have been instrumental in misleading. I rely with confidence upon their readiness to do me justice, or at least those, of whom they are spiritual advisers.

The law was charged with being unconstitutional. That error has been dispelled, and no man of reputation will now hazard it by denying the constitutionality of the law. It was said, too, that the law abolishes the right of trial by jury, as if the fugitive enjoyed that right under the law of 1793, and it is taken away by the law of 1850. He may test the question of his freedom in the State from which he escapes, by jury trial, like any white citizen, but he has never under any law of the United States had that right in the State to which he escapes. Thus, in this respect, the laws of 1793 and 1850 are *identically* the same. I know of many, upon whom this error has been successfully imposed. Many were made to believe, too, that the law suspends the writ of *habeas corpus*; and this error could not be corrected until it had led to fixed prejudices, over which truth does not easily prevail. It is now well understood and conceded, that the law could not constitutionally, and in fact does not, suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*. But the list of gross misrepresentations does not stop here. Men were told that the law of 1850 imposes a penalty of \$1,000 on every one, who shall refuse to aid in the arrest of a fugitive slave. There is no such provision in the law, and it does not impose the penalty of a single farthing for such refusal. It has been also represented that all the fees and expenses attending the proceedings under this law are to be paid out of the public treasury. No grosser misrepresentation could have been circulated, since the law *expressly* provides, that all such fees and expenses shall be "*paid by such claimants, their agents or attorneys*, whether such supposed fugitive from service or labor be ordered to be delivered to such claimants by the final determination of such



commissioner or not;" and in the late case arising in this city, I am informed, that such fees and expenses were paid by the claimant to the amount of several hundred dollars. It is true, that, in the case of a threatened rescue by force, after a decision in favor of the claimant, the marshal may be required to remove the slave out of the State at the expense of the government. This, however, cannot be done without proof of a threatened rescue. If those, who make this complaint against the law would allow it to be executed, the ground of the complaint would not exist. This provision evidently assumes, that it would be unjust to compel the claimant, to bear the expense of overcoming a mob, assembled to resist the execution of the law, after that law has decided in his favor.

Such are some of the many errors which have been industriously circulated among the people concerning the late fugitive slave law. Many have no doubt honestly confided in them, and they may justly hold those responsible, whose superior means of information ought to protect themselves as well as others against such misrepresentations.

I cannot with propriety further detain you with a detailed legal exposition of the provisions of the law of 1850. I desire, however, to quote a passage from the opinion of Attorney General Crittenden, given to President Fillmore before he approved the bill. Says he, in that opinion :

"This bill, therefore, *confers no right* on the owner of the fugitive slave. It only gives him an appointed and peaceable remedy," &c.

And again he says :

"The act of February 12, 1793, before alluded to, so far as it respects any constitutional question that can arise out of this bill, is identical with it. It authorizes the like arrest of the fugitive slave, the like trial, the like judgement, the like certificate, with the like authority to the owner, by virtue of that certificate as his warrant, to remove him to the State or Territory from which he escaped ; and the constitutionality of that act in all those particulars has been affirmed by the adjudications of State tribunals and by the courts of the United States without a single dissent, so far as I know."—(Baldwin's C. C. R., 577, 579.)

I have thus far alluded to the fugitive slave law, not for the purpose of defending it in *every single* provision, but for sustaining it as one of the great compromise measures designed for the pacification of the country. It may in some respects be improved or modified ; and I shall be happy in returning to my seat in Congress a slave to no pledges, which will prevent me from voting and acting upon any question of amendment or modification, as my conscience, my oath, and my best judgment may dictate. Few human laws are made perfect in the first instance. I desire to see this law made as perfect as practicable, with a view of rendering exact justice to the slave, and at the same time standing by the constitution of my country. If it were a question of mere philanthropy or humanity towards the slave, I would go as far as any in his favor. But I will not go one step with any, who desire to break down or leap over the barriers of the Constitution. I know of no advantage, which I can put in competition with that sacred instrument, as the basis—the **SOLE BASIS—OF THE AMERICAN UNION.**

The absolute repeal of the law, therefore, presents a very different question ; and that leads me to submit a few remarks upon the present state of affairs. Elections of a very exciting character have just been held in several of the Northern States, and I have been advised, that in many instances—and I know it to be true in some—members of Congress have been elected upon solemn and written pledges to an absolute repeal of the law in question, without amendment or modification. In some instances, all other questions have been overlooked, and *repeal* has formed the single and only issue. It is this fact which now gives just cause for fresh apprehension to the friends of the Union, both



North and South. Repeal, *repeal*, REPEAL, is now the watchword of new agitation.\*

What in substance are the questions thus presented? They are, whether peace and fraternity shall reign between the States of this confederacy, or agitation triumph with all its present evils and future dangers; whether we will stand by the compromise measures of Congress, or undo all that was done, after nine months of incessant and intense agitation; in fact, whether we will stand by the Union and the Constitution. Every candid observer must see, that *repeal is disunion*. I have had some advantages for knowing the exact state of public sentiment amongst our Southern brethren; and it is my sincere conviction that an absolute repeal of the law would inevitably lead to disunion, and disunion must lead to the horrors of a civil war, such as has never before been witnessed, and the end of which no man can foresee.

Whoever, therefore, is for repeal, is for disunion, though he may not design it. Whoever is for repeal, must resolve to disregard the positive requirement of the Constitution, that fugitive slaves "SHALL be delivered up." In the language of Mr. Webster: "I put it to all the sober and sound minds at the North, as a question of morals, and a question of conscience. What right have they, in all their legislative capacity, or any other, to endeavor to get round this Constitution, to embarrass the free exercise of the rights secured by the Constitution to the person whose slaves escaped from them? None at all—none at all. Neither in the forum of conscience, nor before the face of the Constitution are they justified, in my opinion."

For myself, therefore, entertaining such views, I cannot join in the agitation cry of repeal. Upon this question, I say it boldly, I am a peace man, an anti-agitation man, a compromise man, a UNION man. I stand before you as such, and wish to address you as such, by whatever party-name you have hitherto been designated. All other party questions, in my opinion, sink into insignificance compared with those raised by any issue, that involves, ultimately, the peace of the country and the dissolution of this Union.

But absolute repeal of one of the adjustment measures is demanded. I put this question to the North, as a question of justice, of right and wrong: Is it just for the North now to hold on to all she gained by the compromise, and take back what she, or rather, what the Constitution, gave to the South? Has not the North great reason for being satisfied with the compromise measures? We gained the admission of the free State of California without any division of her territory. We gained territorial governments over Utah and New Mexico without recognition of slavery. We gained the abolition of the slave traffic in the District of Columbia. And, as a compensation for all this, what did we do? We agreed to abide by the constitution, and passed a law to carry out its requirements in respect to the surrender of fugitive slaves.

It is plain to see where the difficulty arises. It lies in a species of extremism peculiar to each section of the Union. From this extremism has sprung that most baneful of all ideas, the idea of *sectionalism*, of *geographical parties*, against which we have been warned by the Father of our Country, and which he seemed to foresee as the rock of our future danger. This sectionalism claims on one side, everything for the North, and on the other, everything for the South. Hence it is the natural mother of national feud and discord. Here are our Scylla and Charybdis. If we would avoid them in the future, this spirit of *sectionalism* must be supplanted with that of *nationalism*. We must think more of

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\* NOTE.—Mr. Buel's competitor for Congress, at the late election in Michigan, published a letter, in which he denounced the Fugitive Slave Law in strong language, and, without suggesting or alluding to any amendment or modification of it, closed with the following words: "I AM IN FAVOR OF ITS SPEEDY REPEAL:" signed, "E. J. PENNIMAN;" dated, "Plymouth, October 18, 1850."



the *whole* Union, I do not say, less of its *parts*. We must cultivate *national*, instead of a *sectional* patriotism; and, above all, we must cultivate that spirit of fraternity *in which the Union had its birth, by which it lives, and without which it must die*.

Can there be a falser standard of patriotism than that erected by the sectionalism to which I have alluded? It is the standard of *proscription*—for it proscribes every locality save that in which it originates. It is the standard of *extremism*—for it allows no middle course. It is the standard of *partiality and injustice*—for it seeks legislation to benefit a part, rather than the whole. It exists equally on both sides of the Union; and hence comes the danger. It calls upon Southern representatives to stand up and claim all for the South, and Northern representatives to stand up and claim all for the North. Well, suppose this shall be done: what, then, will become of the Union? Who will be left to stand up and claim anything for that? None—none. She will cease to exist, for she will be converted into two hostile sections, each battling for itself, and none for her. Such is the inevitable tendency of that sectionalism, which has already wellnigh severed the bonds of the Union.

Where, then, ought I to be found in Congress? Shall I act with either sectional extreme? I cannot do it, since I regard the spirit of sectionalism as the parent of our greatest dangers. I say now, as I have said in the House of Representatives, that I am not “merely the representative of the district, State, or region of country from which I come, but of the *whole* Union, and I am proud of it—*all and every part*.” You will pardon, I trust, these personal allusions to myself. The occasion and circumstances, by which I am attended, will, I am sure, justify them in your estimation. And I can now recur with satisfaction to my sentiments, as they were openly avowed to the convention by which I was nominated as a candidate for election to Congress in 1848. I quote from my remarks on that occasion:

“If elected, I shall approach the discharge of my duties with diffidence but firmness; and, in that event, offer a pledge of all my time and services, that I may render myself a worthy representative of the flourishing emporium of our flourishing State, worthy of the district whose interests may be more immediately confided to me, and worthy of the peninsular State.

“With a view to other and wider interests, I should hope to render myself a worthy representative of the North and West; but, with a still more comprehensive vision, I should hope not to overlook my *duties and obligations to the constitution*. I should hope to become a worthy representative of the Union. The *Union*—there is a power in that word, which with me overcomes all. It has a charm which I cannot resist. It speaks with a siren voice, that wins to its embrace. From childhood I have been taught to venerate it; and that, which was worthy of veneration then, now hangs in the memory holier still, as a household treasure upon the family altar. I hope never to assist in marring that national picture, which is adorned with the deeds and heroes of the Revolution, and with the glorious achievements of two subsequent wars, that have covered us over with imperishable fame and renown. I hope never to aid in drawing that black line of disunion, which can never be drawn without dividing asunder the graves of the revolution.”

At the same time, in *all* my public addresses immediately preceding my election, in respect to *legislation by Congress* against slavery in the new and free territory, I held to the expediency of non-intervention. I then fully believed, and endeavored to show, that this plan, if carried out, would result satisfactorily to the country; and the condition of affairs in Congress has proved it to be the only plan, upon which the dangerous question could be settled. For this view of the question I received no small share of censure from my political opponents and their leading journals, and I was even publicly and in writing invited to a discussion of it through the district, by my competitor, who pledged himself in the letter of invitation to the opposite opinion. Having apprehension of the dangers, which have now nearly overtaken us, I then indulged in and stood committed to the sentiments above referred to, and I endeavored to secure their success in the passage of the late peace measures of Congress.



But, gentlemen, we hear it constantly said, "There is no danger." What do people expect? Shall we look for signs in the heavens to warn us of the future? Must an earthquake come to arouse us from our slumber? We go about inquiring, "What new advices?" Can anything be more new, than that Americans should be debating the dissolution of the Union? We may meet the danger when it is actually upon us, but it may then be beyond our control. It may then be too late. It is far wiser to prevent than to combat the dangers of the future.

Our greatest cause of danger is our blindness to our actual condition and to the events that are passing around us. We have seen Congress unable to legislate for a period of nine months. The wheels of government were almost stopped for the want of appropriations. For a long period the government, with all its officers, civil, military, and executive, was without money. The army was unpaid; the navy was unpaid; our foreign ministers were unpaid; and, in fact, every branch of the government was threatened with dissolution—not by the sword, but by simple stoppage. Conventions have been held, one after another, all over the country, some for Union and some for disunion. The laws of the Union are threatened with resistance in the South, and with resistance in the North.

Shall we look further into the sad picture? What, then, is now going on at Nashville? A convention from the Southern States re-assembled and re-opened with the language of secession. What is Georgia doing? Engaged in electing a convention to deliberate upon secession. What is Mississippi doing? The governor has called a special session of the legislature to consider of secession. Look at the progress of secession sentiments in Alabama. I need not allude to the state of things in South Carolina. Hear the language of the patriotic State of North Carolina, and many other States, which have never before faltered in their attachment to the Union—all solemnly declaring that, upon this fresh agitation, if successful, hangs its final destiny. Brethren of one great family are beginning to look upon each other as enemies. The fraternal cords of the Union have been broken—the religious cords have been partially sundered. The process of social and religious disorganization has commenced even among ourselves. Ancient party lines and landmarks are beginning to disappear, and former party questions are fast sinking into the vortex of sectionalism. Yet we go on, as if thoughtless of the present or future, *blind to what is actually before our eyes, deaf to the sounds brought to our ears upon every breeze, and dumb, except to lull ourselves to sleep with the soft words, "There is no danger."*

Whilst such is the fearful progress of disorganization about us, we may be able to measure the *present*; but who can measure the *future*? Who can tell when and where it is to stop? From what is passing around us we should draw some useful lessons. Our danger springs not so much from the adoption of aggressive measures against either section of the Union, as from threatening and agitating them. Agitation has brought us to our present condition, without the adoption of that measure, which our Southren brethren regarded with so much hostility. But there is now a renewed agitation, started upon a more dangerous basis than the former. If persisted in, who can tell to what point it may drive us, that shall be short of anarchy and civil war—civil war, not only with our Southern brethren, but at last with ourselves?

I am aware, fellow-citizens, that I have used strong language; but supineness and timidity are unequal to the times. I may err in my apprehensions of the future. I wish I could be assured of it. But if I do, I err in common with the ablest and wisest statesmen and patriots of the land. They have thought and declared that there was, and is danger. I have read the warning language of McLean, that "there is enough in the general aspect of our affairs, if not to alarm, at least to admonish us, that every cord which binds us together should be strengthened."



I have seen Cass standing up like the strong oak of the forest, breasting the storm of sectionalism from the North and the South; and there, too, side by side, and shoulder to shoulder with him, stood Clay and Webster. To this list might be added the names of Cobb and Boyd, of Dickinson, Douglass, Houston, Foote, and many others, too numerous to mention, of both political parties, and both sections of the Union. I have seen all these with true patriotism leaping over the boundaries of party, forgetting all personal or party feuds, and mingling their voices in one common effort to turn away the storm. Ought we, my friends, to hesitate in following their patriotic example?

But we are told, that we can fight for the Union. So we can, and we may be successful. But what kind of a Republic—what sort of a free government—what sort of an AMERICAN UNION will that be, bound together by the sword, and by cords drenched in fraternal blood? If needs be, I trust that the Union contains enough of strong arms and brave hearts to sustain it under all contingencies. Let us hold on to it, as the dearest object of our affections. Let us cling to it the stronger, as the storm rages more fiercely. It is the property of our children, as well as of ourselves. It is the property of the world, and is the world's minister of Christianity, civilization, and liberty. I wish to see it preserved at all hazards, but preserved by the ties of affection, rather than by the sword. I wish to see its great arsenal of defence in our hearts. THE UNION WAS BORN BY FRATERNITY, AND IT MUST LIVE BY FRATERNITY, OR PERISH FOREVER.

[Mr. Buel was here presented, by David Stuart, esq., in behalf of the committee of arrangements, with a copy of the Constitution of the United States, printed upon parchment, and bearing the inscription,

“PRESENTED TO

HON. ALEXANDER W. BUEL,

REPRESENTATIVE IN THE THIRTY-FIRST CONGRESS FROM MICHIGAN,

*As a testimonial of regard for his consistent support in Congress of the Constitution of his Country,*

AT A PUBLIC DINNER GIVEN TO HIM BY HIS FELLOW-CITIZENS AT DETROIT,

November 19, 1850.”

Mr. Buel thus continued his remarks:]

I desire to express to those, in whose behalf I have been presented with this testimonial of regard, my most grateful acknowledgments. I can possess no more valuable evidence of the regard of my fellow-citizens than that, by which they have seen fit to connect my service in Congress with the defence of the constitution of my country. I shall thereby be ever reminded afresh of my duty and obligation to sustain it.

I regard this sacred instrument as the bond of our national Union—the basis of our national safety. Its fabric was raised by the hands of our revolutionary fathers; its foundations were cemented by their blood. Ought we to do less for it than they? They have transmitted it to us as the most precious legacy they could bequeath, and not for us alone, but for our children and our children's children. Let us, then, swear to stand by it, and defend it to the last extremity, in these the days of its trial. It is better to contend for the *first* than the *last* line of the Constitution.

For myself, I have taken an oath to support that Constitution—the *whole* Constitution, not a *part*. What right have I to hold on to *one-half* and reject



the *other*? None at all—none at all. I shall endeavor faithfully to fulfil my oath, my *whole* oath. He has read history to but little advantage, who has not learned the wisdom of the maxim—“*Lex suprema, salus populi.*” It is my present and will be my last hope, that the independent rights of the States, as secured by this instrument, may not be violated—that each may hold fast upon the Constitution—that its *guaranties* may be ever held sacred and inviolable—that the Union, with its unmeasured blessings, may be perpetuated as our most precious inheritance, and its STAR OF PROMISE fulfil the just expectations of our children and an admiring world.